

Ngā Haerenga | Transition Journeys Phase Three Summary Report

Key findings and case illustrations of rangatahi in their second year following their move from statutory care to self-determined living

September 2023

The Oranga Tamariki Evidence Centre works to build the evidence base that helps us better understand wellbeing and what works to improve outcomes for New Zealand’s children, young people and their whānau.



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Introduction

The *Ngā Haerenga / Transition Journeys* (Ngā Haerenga)¹ research project is a primarily qualitative, longitudinal study commissioned by Oranga Tamariki in 2019. Its focus is on increasing understanding of the journeys and lived experience of rangatahi and aims to share their voices as they move from statutory care to self-determined living. Research was undertaken over three years by a research collaboration made up of three external regional teams working in partnership with the Oranga Tamariki Evidence Centre.

Year 1 of the study focussed on the aspirations, planning and preparation of a cohort of rangatahi on the cusp of turning 18, as they anticipated their move to independence. Year 2 focussed on experiences and short-term outcomes 6-12 months after they had left care.

This report summarises key findings from the third and final year which explores the medium term experiences and outcomes of rangatahi 18 to 24 months after they have left the care or custody of Oranga Tamariki and transitioned into independent living. In some cases, these journeys were supported by the newly established Transition Support Service (TSS)².

The two primary purposes for the Ngā Haerenga research project are:

1. To hear rangatahi voices and to explore and document rangatahi experiences and journeys out of statutory care and/or custody into self-determined adulthood.
2. To build our understanding of:
 - a) rangatahi thinking as they prepare to leave care, including their aspirations, intentions, and perceived needs;
 - b) the trajectories following exit, including experiences, successes and challenges, as well as outcomes across key TSS domains and
 - c) constraining and enabling factors, which contribute to successful outcomes up to 18 to 24 months after leaving care.

Methodology

Two overarching research methodologies have been used in this project – Kaupapa Māori and Longitudinal Qualitative Research. Further, rangatahi case studies (n=9) are used in the different sections of the report to give voice to and illustrate experiences, contributing factors and outcomes for pertinent transition journeys, each of which span the three years of the study. Finally, a Likert scale was used in interviews to ask rangatahi to indicate how well their journey was going overall, since leaving care (see below). Two analytical frameworks are utilised in the study, providing a basis for data collection, validation of key findings, robust analysis and reporting structure. The first framework included six priority focus areas based on Oranga Tamariki identified TSS key outcome areas. These were:

- kāinga (home or living situation)

¹ The name for this project was collectively developed as a working title by the research rōpū over a series of planning hui. It was chosen as it encapsulated the project's focus on rangatahi and their experiences of journeying from statutory care to more self-determined living and reflected the bicultural approach to this research. The bilingual working title suggested by the research rōpū was supported and adopted by the Oranga Tamariki Evidence Centre and the project advisory group.

² The Oranga Tamariki Transition Support Service was established in 2019 to support rangatahi in the transition cohort (aged 15-17 years) to plan and prepare for leaving care and to provide advice and assistance up to age 25. More information on the TSS can be found here: [Transition Support Service for rangatahi | Oranga Tamariki — Ministry for Children](#)

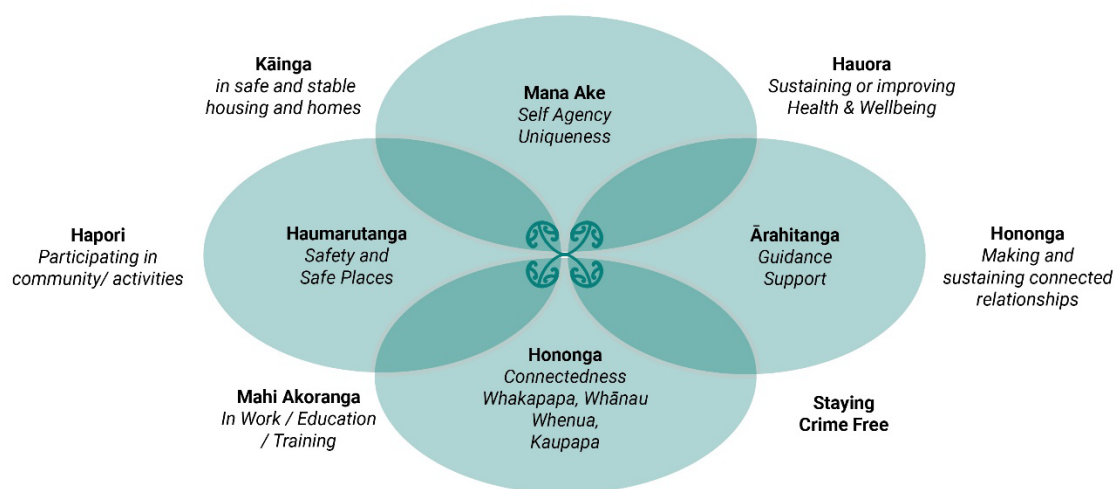


- mahi/akoranga (employment, education or training)
- hauora (improving or maintaining health and wellbeing)
- ngā hononga (relationships and connections – with all things including families/whānau/hapū/iwi and with te ao Māori, identity and belonging where appropriate)
- hāpori (involvement in community/cultural activities), and
- where applicable, whether young people had stopped reoffending or were living crime-free.³

Ngā Āhuatanga framework

A second framework used in this study is the Ngā Āhuatanga framework which emerged while researchers were making sense of the findings of rangatahi journeys. This kaupapa Māori framework was developed and applied as an analytical framework in year 2, then validated and applied to data collection, analysis and reporting on findings in year 3. From the rangatahi validation and researchers' analyses, four āhuatanga conceptual themes stood out as being relevant in assisting rangatahi to express their multi-faceted, often overlapping experiences and journeys across the six focus areas. These were: hononga (connectedness), haumarutanga (safety/safe places), mana ake (self-agency/unique identities) and ārahitanga (guidance). They are shown in the figure below:

Research focus areas and ngā Āhuatanga o Ngā Haerenga



Source: Ngā Haerenga Māori researchers. Diagram developed by Louise Were.

Year three fieldwork and analysis

Forty-four rangatahi participated in year 1 of the study. The three research teams maintained connection and conducted the regionally developed, semi-structured interviews with rangatahi in each of the three years.

Twenty-four of the original year 1 rangatahi cohort took part in the year 3 interview (55% retention rate), the majority of whom were interviewed alone, however some chose to have

³ The six key outcome areas were identified as priority focus areas for the study by the Ngā Haerenga Advisory Group at the outset of the project in 2020. They reflect outcome areas of interest for the newly established Transition Support Service being delivered by Oranga Tamariki in partnership with community and iwi organisations across Aotearoa since July 2019.

trusted people support them in the interview. As in Year 1, over half of the rangatahi that participated in the year 3 interview identified as Māori. Males however (n=15) were more likely to remain in the study at year 3 than females (n= 9).

Summaries were produced after the interviews by each of the regional rōpū and were shared at a third and final sense-making hui supporting collective analysis by the collaborating research team. At this hui key themes, explanatory concepts and potential rangatahi case studies were collectively identified using the analytical frameworks.

Ngā Haerenga | Transition Journeys Year 3 report reflects the 24 participating rangatahi perspectives, experiences and journeys of transitioning out of care into independent living and is written to highlight the rangatahi voice⁴ through stories that were shared with researchers.

Findings for rangatahi 18-24 months after leaving care

Self-ratings on how things are going since leaving care

In years 2 and 3 of the study, a Likert scale where rangatahi were asked to rate how well they felt things were going ‘overall’ since leaving care was used to supplement the qualitative findings. In year 3 twenty of the 24 rangatahi interviewed responded to the closed-ended question with the majority feeling that “things are definitely going OK” for them since leaving care. This can be seen in the table below:

Table 1: Year 3 responses to the question “Overall, since leaving care, do you feel things are going OK?”

Scale response	Number of rangatahi (n)	Proportion of responses (%)
1 - No, things are not at all going OK	0	0%
2 - No, things are not really going OK	2	10%
3 - Yes, I think things are going OK	7	35%
4 - Yes, things are definitely going OK	11	55%
5 - I don't know	0	0%
TOTAL	20	100%

The following summary provides an overview of the key findings of each of the six focus areas of the Ngā Haerenga |Transition Journeys. The findings are also aligned with the Ngā Āhuatanga framework, with enablers and barriers identified for these areas. These can be seen in the tables below.⁵

Kāinga | Home or living situation

At 18 to 24 months after leaving care, most rangatahi were comfortable and living in safe and stable kāinga environments. These were typically with previous caregivers, partners, with biological or extended whānau, and/or in secure rentals. Others were flatting, living with

⁴ Note: References to whānau/family are based on rangatahi view and context of their relationships and often do not distinguish between biological and ‘chosen whānau’.

⁵ Rangatahi voices, including quotes and anecdotes, can be found in the findings sections of the full Year 3 report.



their own children or boarding, while rangatahi living with disabilities were often with supportive foster parents or residing in supported living situations.

Some rangatahi were wanting to move on from their current situation (e.g., due to conflict with flatmates or neighbours) and a few were effectively homeless and/or living in potentially unsafe spaces including emergency accommodation and adult correctional facilities. Looking ahead to what they wanted for themselves and others like them, many rangatahi wanted better, more tailored advice and support for understanding entitlements, navigating the housing system, and easier access to potential sources of financial support when needed.

Key enablers and constraints for safe and stable kāinga journeys

	Hononga	Haumarutanga	Mana Ake	Ārahitanga	Other factors
Enablers	Living with trusted people who provide safe/stable kāinga; Assistance to connect and find stable kāinga from trusted people – i.e.: whānau, friends, former carers/foster parents, partners (and their whānau), services ⁶ .	Safe living environments; for rangatahi with disabilities – supported living situations where individual needs were recognised and catered for, Caregiver access to respite care.	Courage, determination and proactiveness to find homes independently; Budgeting skills; self-discipline to stay and willingness to leave if not the right fit; Good relationship management.	Advice and support from whānau, support services and community groups to navigate housing / accommodation system.	Sufficient income and/or people to share costs with; Co-ordinated service support and knowledge of entitlements and how to access these; Dedication from some supported living providers.
Constraints	Lacking healthy, supportive relationships with whānau and friends, and/or a reluctance to ask for support from them to access safe and stable kāinga options.	Lack of availability and accessibility of safe, suitable accommodation; Housing provider discrimination; Unfair entitlement rules / criteria creating inaccessibility (e.g., MSD/W&I).	Unawareness of how to navigate housing and financial support services or advocate for themselves; Interpersonal conflict and limited relationship skills.	Limited/inconsistent/i inaccurate support and advice or negative perceptions/ experiences of services from providers/services (e.g., OT/TSS kaimahi).	Financial constraints – high costs with too low income (e.g., from under-employment); Lack of rental history especially in competitive housing market.

Mahi/akoranga | employment, education or training

At 18 to 24 months after leaving care, most rangatahi were in some form of mahi (work) – be it full time, part time or in a voluntary capacity – or in akoranga (training/education), and in some cases doing both. Often rangatahi were in entry level work in manufacturing, retail and hospitality, although some had recently progressed or moved sideways. Labouring work was especially common for former YJ rangatahi who were working. Some rangatahi were seeking more hours of work or were dissatisfied with their current roles and looking for a career change. A quarter were not in work or education at all, with the main income of several rangatahi coming from the Job Seeker, caregiving or disability related benefit.

Looking ahead, quite a few rangatahi wanted to find work, secure more reliable work, increase hours or improve or change their existing jobs. Others wanted to begin or continue participation in education and training opportunities to expand their work prospects or

⁶ 'Services' or 'support services' in the context of these tables encompasses all agencies and providers working with rangatahi including but not limited to TSS, Oranga Tamariki, Work & Income, community and iwi providers.



wanted to start their own business. Rangatahi wanted more practical, tailored guidance and career support, and more responsive, active job-seeking help (including from WINZ, Oranga Tamariki and TSS) for themselves and others like them. Rangatahi with disability-related needs wanted to continue accessing wraparound bespoke support while those in prison wanted better access to development opportunities. More culturally tailored support was desired by some.

Key enablers and constraints for successful mahi/akoranga journeys

	Hononga	Haumarutanga	Mana Ake	Ārahitanga	Other factors
Enablers	Whānau, friends & peer connections to work; Whānau support for job seeking; Connections through work and support services to upskill; Sense of contribution to whānau.	Wrap around disability support; Safe & supportive working/learning environments (including culturally).	Vision of pathway/goals; Motivation, perseverance, and self-discipline to find and sustain job/education opportunities or change career choice; Sense of pride from working; Strong work ethic; Work builds confidence, happiness.	Career planning and navigation support from mentors and support services (including TSS).	Gaining a driver's licence; Access to transport to obtain & get to work/study; Accessible financial supports for study & work.
Constraints	Lack of supportive whānau & friend networks; Difficulty managing and navigating relationships	Workplace conflicts/ bullies; Limited opportunities in prison; Prohibitive entitlement rules (e.g., student allowance, abatement rates, remand courses).	Low motivation and confidence; Confusion about next steps; Being triggered and managing stressful work relationships; Disability constraints (e.g., ADHD) and impacts of drug use.	Limited career guidance/pathway planning and support for navigating system (e.g., TSS financial assistance, job search support); Prohibitive entitlement rules (e.g., student allowance, abatement rates).	Financial constraints to seeking, applying for and securing work; Limited job opportunities; Conflicting responsibilities, (e.g., needing to look after whānau).

Hauora | Health and Wellbeing

Many rangatahi continued to suffer from a wide range of mental health, disability and substance abuse conditions and issues (e.g., post-traumatic stress, anxiety and depression, autism and ADHD, alcohol and other drug use). While these conditions ranged in severity, several rangatahi specifically referenced experiencing trauma from their time in care, and some, but not all, were accessing therapeutic supports that, to varying degrees, helped them to manage their hauora and participate as best they could. A number of rangatahi were mindful of looking after their health and wellbeing and were engaging in regular physical exercise, and were valuing nutritious kai (food).

Looking ahead, rangatahi wanted to sustain or return to sport/physical activities, be drug free, and receive therapeutic services. For themselves and others like them, they wanted better advice and support from support services in accessing hauora activities, navigating the health system; easier, more affordable access to mental health and substance abuse services and more responsive staff in those services.



Key enablers and constraints for positive hauora journeys

	Hononga	Haumarutanga	Mana Ake	Ārahitanga	Other factors
Enablers	Good, trustworthy, supportive relationships with whānau, partners, friends & service kaimahi; Relatable, effective therapeutic & medical services.	Warm, safe, inclusive, professional settings, community spaces and teams; Whānau & other support to exercise & eat well.	Vision, self-drive, and perseverance helped rangatahi find & access services, stick with treatment & persist with healthy choices; Self-awareness, smart-living and taking responsibility for own care.	Whānau role modelling; Medical/therapeutic professionals' understanding, advice and lived experience.	Financial support for therapeutic services from Oranga Tamariki and TSS.
Constraint	Low trust in and being misunderstood from support workers & health professionals; Limited whānau or friends to support participation.	Difficulty navigating the system and accessing useful therapeutic services (\$, waiting lists, not listening, therapists terminating services early). Unwelcoming or unsafe spaces (e.g., housing or hauora environments).	Shyness and ongoing mental health issues (e.g., anxiety) stop rangatahi asking for support, accessing health professionals & activities or maintaining hauora.	Lack of, or inconsistent information, advice & support from TSS & OT kaimahi with no follow through.	Little \$ for therapeutic or medical treatment and healthy kai; Other commitments (e.g., work) so no time for sports / healthy activities.

Hononga | Connected relationships

At 18 to 24 months since leaving care most rangatahi described having positive relationships and connections in their lives that enhanced wellbeing and provided rangatahi with practical and other support such as emotional, cultural and social. Over this time, some rangatahi had established new or re-built relationships with previously estranged parents, siblings and wider whānau and also with caregivers, friends, and sports coaches. Some rangatahi continued to be relatively isolated and to have non-existent, strained or unsupportive relationships with their whānau or peers.

Several rangatahi Māori were exploring further and developing their connections in te ao Māori, while some were not interested in exploring their 'Māori side'. Looking ahead, some rangatahi wanted better support to build and sustain connections (e.g., transport or responsive services helping them to connect). Others wanted access to counselling to help improve or better manage challenging interpersonal relationships and whānau dynamics.

Key enablers and constraints for developing hononga

	Hononga	Haumarutanga	Mana Ake	Ārahitanga	Other factors
Enablers	Strong connections or reconnections with whānau (including caregivers, partners & becoming a parent); Social connections; Te ao Māori interests/connections.	Having safe relationships and environments (e.g., where disputes / differences do not undermine relationships).	Developing maturity and confidence in managing conflict & negative relationships; Setting boundaries; Wanting to connect with others & persevering; Wanting to be a good parent/ role model.	Oranga Tamariki cultural assessments; Support service kaimahi & caregivers build meaningful relationships; service providers connect meaningfully & give good advice and support.	Access to relationship counselling; service providers' help to connect with whānau and others; Transportation options (e.g., driver licence).
Constraints	Disconnection (including enforced) – whānau or whakapapa not being known, whānau being unsafe or unwelcoming, current or previous Care & Protection orders; Institutional and practical barriers to seeing whānau, e.g., phones, not able to connect with siblings in care of others.	Unsafe homes inhibit positive relationships; Unstable homes disrupt connections; Prisons limit positive relationships & parents' ability to keep whānau safe.	Interpersonal conflict dispositions, anxiety, low trust, detachment (often trauma related) and disability; Deciding to end negative relationships.	Nil, inconsistent or poor TW ⁷ support; Low trust in TW/SWs & reluctance to ask for help; Lack of healthy role models, mentors & relationship guidance/mental health supports.	Geographical distances, with limited \$ or health & limited options to travel across regions or cities.

Hapori | Participating in the community

While not necessarily a priority, many, but not all, rangatahi were engaged in and enjoying hobbies and community and cultural activities at 18 to 24 months. Activities participated in were diverse, ranging from an array of sports, online communities, marae-based learning and dance classes through to volunteering and helping out in community spaces and events. Several rangatahi were not participating in community activities with some rangatahi having to prioritise new adult responsibilities over hapori activities. Overall, rangatahi were keen to continue with, re-join or join new or more hobbies and social activities going forward, but some needed financial support to do so and/or more active encouragement and assistance to identify the right opportunities and to engage.

⁷ TSS transition workers (TW), social workers (SW).

Key enablers and constraints for engaging hapori journeys

	Hononga	Haumarutanga	Mana Ake	Ārahitanga	Other factors
Enablers	Connections with culture, whakapapa, whānau, friends & workmates gives sense of community and helps identify and connect to opportunities for hapori participation.	Feeling safe and welcome in the space (e.g., activities, teams); Supported living & active support important for those with disabilities to engage.	Resilience, confidence, agency; Awareness of opportunities; Self-drive & courage to get out there, make it happen; Sense of contributing and 'giving back' to community / whānau.	Services identifying opportunities, providing encouragement / active support and facilitating connection to hapori; Bespoke planning for disabilities.	Financial support from organisations & whānau.
Constraints	Lack of connections / isolation inhibits awareness, opportunities and encouragement; Some whānau actively discourage participation.	Negative, unsafe experiences or people associations can lead to place/group avoidance; Sports can be more 'aggro' at adult level.	Shyness and wariness to put self out there (often related to past trauma); Low awareness of opportunities.	No people connections to activity/networks of interest; Inadequate encouragement or practical support.	Being an 'adult' with limited time, money and energy; Inadequate resources; Accessibility.

Staying crime free

Of the six rangatahi in a YJ residence in year 1, three were in an adult prison at the time of the year 3 interview and three were working and successfully “staying out of trouble” in the community. Of the three now in prison, one had transferred directly to adult prison and two, following their exit from residence, had re-offended. These rangatahi in prison valued visits and phone contact from whānau, wanted someone to advocate for them in the system, wanted to participate in training and rehabilitation while inside, and wanted to be able to prepare for their exit. Those in the community wanted to work, earn their own money and keep out of trouble.

Key enablers and constraints for staying crime free

	Hononga	Haumarutanga	Mana Ake	Ārahitanga	Other factors
Enablers	Practical (e.g., mahi) and motivational support from whānau, especially parents, grandparents & girlfriends; Wanting to prove themselves & be there for whānau; Cultural connections; Positive TW & SW connections & supports.	Living with whānau, & engaging with te ao Māori; Familiarity & routine of prison can provide sense of security.	Maturity, motivation and making deliberate, positive life choices e.g., to access rehabilitation, avoid drugs & risky people, focus on work, parenting & keeping busy; Managing expectations.	TSS/support service planning & support during & after sentence (e.g., kāinga, health, job search support); Probation officer support.	Employment and earning a wage, Facilitation of effective counselling & rehabilitation programmes; Having spiritual 'faith' gives hope & resilience.
Constraints	Cutting ties with risky people/ places can be socially isolating; Prison environment isolates rangatahi from whānau support / motivation.	Emergency housing & prison can feel unsafe. Limited access to rehabilitation & courses in prison / on remand; Prison environment (e.g., fights).	Ongoing addiction, and possible untreated mental health and disability issues; Falling in with 'wrong crowd'; Lacking certainty about release date reduces motivation to access support & make positive choices.	Poor transition planning; Limited support from TSS and other support service kaimahi once in community. Poor representation, advocacy and advice.	Systemic issues; Unfair legal and other processes; No driver's licence & limited mobility.

Conclusions

This Ngā Haerenga | Transition Journeys longitudinal research study has successfully applied and integrated kaupapa Māori data gathering and sense-making methods (including the Ngā Haerenga Āhutatanga framework) to improve understandings of rangatahi journeys from care into independence. At 18 to 24 months after leaving care, 24 rangatahi transition experiences and journeys have been heard and a range of complex, diverse stories and medium-term outcomes were observed and reflected upon.

Key high-level observations include:

- In year 3 the Likert scale results to the question “Overall, since leaving care, do you feel things are going OK?” were generally positive and showed an upward trend over time for most rangatahi.
- The prominence of hononga (in all its forms) as a strong enabler of the six focus areas is evident, particularly with whānau and friends as well as kaimahi. Rangatahi often referred to the benefits of meaningful relationships and connections throughout all focus areas and in relation to support service kaimahi. The lack of hononga with supportive people sometimes constrained and limited successful rangatahi transitions. Where this was the case, rangatahi were often relying on their own strength and determination to advocate for themselves, stepping out to their own safe and stable living situations, and/or being self-reliant through maintaining employment.
- The variable nature of the support, contact and understanding from Oranga Tamariki and TSS workers was frequently highlighted. While it was present and useful for some rangatahi, for others it had been non-existent or unreliable from year 1 or had become less so over time. Having service providers or kaimahi that were responsive, timely, consistent in their approach, provided meaningful contacts and enabled rangatahi with knowledge and supports, made a positive difference in rangatahi journeys.
- The importance of having safe, stable environments ā-tinana, ā-hinengaro, ā-wairua (physically, mentally and emotionally) was particularly relevant for rangatahi in regards to kāinga, however was an evident enabler for many of the focus areas, the lack of which could create vulnerabilities in other areas.

The Ngā Haerenga Āhutatanga framework has emerged as a very helpful tool in understanding and explaining the diversity, complexity and multifaceted nature of rangatahi transition journeys. The framework could also be usefully applied in other areas and by other agencies and organisations who support rangatahi, and with whom Oranga Tamariki works.

Ngā Haerenga | Transition Journeys project and its findings strongly affirmed the benefit for all the rangatahi transitioning out of care of the importance of individualised, wraparound, consistent and connected transition services. Rangatahi participants who lived with disability as a significant part of their lives seemed to be benefitting from such tailored services. A key valuable action of the TSS going forward could be to ensure connected, wraparound support continues for all rangatahi transitioning from care. Oranga Tamariki could endeavour to ensure its TSS and other relevant agencies and partners’ kaimahi are consistently connected with and present for rangatahi. Further, it could facilitate more consistent collaboration between relevant agencies and services to better provide access and tailored support for rangatahi throughout their transition from care to independence.



Appendices: Multi year case illustrations

Multi-year case illustrations share rangatahi experiences and journeys over time

The full Ngā Haerenga Year 3 report includes a series of individual rangatahi case illustrations which cover the three years of the study. These case illustrations (n=9) are embedded within six priority focus areas for the study:

The nine case illustrations presented in this report have been selected to give voice to rangatahi and to illustrate some of the key aspirations, experiences, dynamics and outcomes of rangatahi journeys, across the six focus areas.

All quotes from participants and the illustrative case study summaries have been de-identified and all names used in this report are pseudonyms.

Kāinga | Housing

A safe place for pēpi - Willow's story

Willow's story has been shared to illustrate positive kāinga outcomes. It highlights the uncertainty rangatahi in care can face when their circumstances change and the way that the presence of, or lack of support by key people such as caregivers and transition workers can have a large impact on their lives. All four of the āhukatanga concepts are present and easily discernible in Willow's story, however mana ake emerges as the main thread that has enabled Willow to turn a challenging journey into a positive outcome for her whānau.

Somewhere safe to call home - Victoria's story

Victoria's story speaks to her experiences with housing during her transition journey. Unfortunately, her story is a stark contrast to Willow's and demonstrates negative kāinga outcomes in the form of unsafe living situations. Victoria talks about the many challenges she has faced which have made securing a safe and stable kāinga difficult, such as mental health struggles and the impacts of past trauma. However, unlike Willow she felt invalidated and unsupported by the people around her who were meant to help. Victoria too, has shown strengths related to her sense of mana ake which have supported her to stay resilient and retain her independence throughout her journey.



A safe place for pēpi: Willow's story

Kāinga Case Illustration #1

Where did my transition journey begin?



Where am I now?



How did I get here?



What's next?

Where did my transition journey begin?

Willow was happy and settled, living in a large city with a non-kin caregiver and their whānau when we met during year one of this study. During this placement, Willow had become hapū (pregnant) and a key challenge for her at that point was feeling uncertain as to whether Oranga Tamariki would continue to fund this living arrangement. Willow felt unsupported by her social worker who was inexperienced with working alongside young pregnant people in her role. This caused much distress for Willow who was attending a Teen Parenting Unit (TPU) at the time and was adamant that she wanted her baby to remain in her care. She felt frustrated.

Although Willow previously had a transition worker, she had been allocated a new one just before the first interview. She was worried about her living situation.

Willow was enjoying the TPU, learning about parenting, literacy and numeracy. Growing up, her mum had kept Willow and her siblings connected to their Māori culture and she continued this at the TPU by participating in the Cultural Group with other parents and speaking te reo Māori.

Willow's caregiver was a huge support to her during this time, helping her arrange a midwife, teaching her how to budget and supporting her general health and wellbeing. Her goals at year 1 were related to caring for her baby and wanting to get her restricted driving licence.

Where am I now?

Willow is back in a relationship with the father of her child and they are living as a family in a three-bedroom, private rental. The challenge now however is that rent is quite expensive – above average for similar-sized houses in her area. Willow and her partner both work full-time and share caregiving responsibilities. She now has her restricted licence which has also helped her visit and stay connected to her younger siblings in nearby towns.

Although she couldn't complete the Likert scale rating at year 2, when asked if she thinks things are going ok at year 3 she rated it as a '4 – yes definitely.' When asked why, she replied, "I just feel very stable."

"they've always told me growing up that I can stay in care until 21 and then I got hapū and they were like, 'no.'"

"Well if I can't stay here with baby, I know that it's going to make me very unstable to start with because I don't know where I'm going to end up or anything..."



"I just feel very stable."



Willow's story continued



How did I get here?



What's next?

How did I get here?

Oranga Tamariki did not continue to fund Willow's caregiving arrangement, so she decided to move out as there was too much financial strain being placed on her caregivers. She rented privately for a short time but decided to move due to unpleasant flatmates. She continued to follow up with the organisation that her previous transition worker came from and eventually they were able to enrol her into a programme at a local marae. Through transition support services there she was linked into a social service which supports care-experienced youth with subsidised housing. Willow stayed there for over half a year before deciding to look for something else due to it being too small.

While searching, Willow had seen some rental listings from her previous landlord.

What's next?

Willow and her partner's current goals are to move elsewhere in Aotearoa to be closer to one of Willow's older siblings, who has a young child of a similar age.

Willow doesn't feel that she will need much assistance going forward and feels well supported. Although she acknowledges the support she has received from key people, much of what Willow has achieved has been the result of her own strength and desire to give her child a safe and stable upbringing.

If she had her time again, Willow would tell her younger self, "To just realise that everything takes time and not just to expect it to happen overnight. And that probably that if you want to go places once you end care, not just rely on the system. You've got to put yourself in this mind frame to get yourself there as well."

"...when I moved out of there it wasn't the fact that I was a bad tenant or she was a bad landlord, it was just the fact that I didn't like the other people in the flat... so when she saw my name pop up, she was more than happy to give us another house, which was good. We pretty much got a house as soon as I applied."



"So [the child] can be around [their] real family and not just [their] foster family."

"I've always had the strength to go out and find resources if I don't feel supported. I've always had that strength to get up and go find those resources even when I was younger, like even just simply finding my own transition worker and things like that. I know that when I get put in situations like that, that because I don't want to repeat my family's history with my [child], I know that I'm able to make those quick decisions."



Somewhere safe to call home: Victoria's Story

Kāinga Case Illustration #2

Where did my transition journey begin?



Where am I now?



How did I get here?



What's next?

Where did my transition journey begin?

Victoria is a young Pākehā female living in the North Island. At the beginning of this study she was 17 years old, living with her boyfriend whom she had only known for a week and under Oranga Tamariki care and protection. She had already had numerous contacts with Youth Justice and spoke of past trauma that she would like to deal with.

Victoria is autistic and was suffering from depression, she had made a suicide attempt by overdosing on medication a week prior to the first interview. Victoria is a strong, sociable and confident young woman who has clear goals around further vocational training in beauty therapy. She also wanted to find stable housing and strengthen relationships with her family, however she believed she needed to deal with her emotional issues first. Victoria didn't feel that her emotional issues were taken seriously, or that Oranga Tamariki and other organisations were helping.

Where am I now?

Victoria has grown a lot over 3 years but has also hardened to disappointments. She is living in an unsafe environment in emergency housing and has been in and out of homelessness over the past 12 months. She feels unsupported in her transition and that there is nowhere to go to find somewhere safe to live.

Victoria was unable to complete her qualifications, has worked off and on but cites battles with mental health and employment affecting her benefit as the main contributors to her inability to earn her living or access housing.

*Child, Adolescent and Family Services provided by a Te Whatu Ora District Health Board

"They're just there. Some of them -- I think CAFS aren't doing anything but the rest are kind of. OT isn't doing anything either, they're the ones that gave me the meds to look after, thinking I was stable enough to carry them, but I obviously wasn't."*



"My transition worker is meant to be helping me but she's kind of said, 'You do it on your own,' my transition worker is like, 'You've used your money, I don't know what else I can do for you.' Like, I don't know who to ask."

"So, I'm back in emergency housing, in [an emergency boarding house] at the moment due to the lack of help from Transitions. They kind of just tossed me away, my transition worker has been very unhelpful. And the house I'm living in is unsafe."

"I've had job interviews but they don't like the hours I'm able to offer, since I'm on a certain benefit I can only work to \$110 a week, which ends up like four or five hours because the minimum wage has gone up. But if I work longer I'll lose my benefit which is my main source of income."



Victoria's Story continued



How did I
get here?



What's next?

How did I get here?

Victoria's Likert Scale rating went from a '4 - Definitely going OK' at the year 2 interview, due to the feeling of independence, to a '2 - Not really going OK' at the year 3 interview. While she has grown as a person, she feels she has gone backwards regarding her mental health and housing situation. After the first interview, Victoria split with her boyfriend and was placed in foster care which did not work out, resulting in her spending the last 18 months in and out of emergency housing and couch surfing. Unfortunately, throughout the three years of interviews neither of her core issues around housing or mental health have been resolved. While Victoria has matured, her challenges have remained consistent throughout. Perceived lack of support from Oranga Tamariki, her transition worker, other agencies, and a feeling of being discarded come through as her main barriers.

What's next?

Victoria has consistently expressed her needs to deal with past trauma, mental health and the need to find safe, stable independent accommodation throughout the three years of interviews. These are still her core goals and aspirations. Victoria has grown personally and continues to be more independent – "I feel like I'm pretty independent. I get myself where I need to be if I have to be somewhere, and I often do a lot of my -- standing up for myself and make appointments for myself because that's been slack by my support. So, I feel like I'm a little bit more independent from when we last met. I feel I've grown up a lot as well, yeah." Victoria's advice to her younger self was around more financial support for those unable to find housing and mental health disability support as she finds it difficult finding programmes to assist with this.

"She [transition worker] actually said some really unprofessional hurtful things, and so I kind of do feel like I have no help with the housing stuff."

"She often says I'm unmanageable, like because of my diagnosis and mental health, but every other support worker is like.... she shouldn't be kind of discarding me like that, like it's not even too hard to handle, she's just kind of given up, which is kind of sad because she's been there since I was 17."



"I think having quite -- having a lot of knowledge on mental health end, abuse and trauma. Because a lot of people coming out of foster care or went into foster care have dealt with a lot of trauma and stuff"

"I would say, stick to your gut and be open to new experiences...just because you have a mindset like this, don't let your mindset be closed, because a closed mindset won't help you get further in life -- because you have to have an open mindset to accept the good and the bad to grow from situations."

Mahi/akoranga | Work, training and education

Looking for a change - Tania's story

Tania's story shows that although some young people in care are eventually able to find a strong sense of haumarutanga with positive and supportive whānau, their work and/or study prospects can still be negatively impacted by not having the right ārahitanga. Her journey illustrates how hauora can be challenged by work situations and how mental health struggles can be exacerbated by experiences such as racism and an inability to get the right support to deal with past trauma. It's clear that Tania has a desire to become more independent, but that certain conditions need to be in place to empower her sense of mana ake further.

Seeking guidance – Oliver's story

Oliver's story is similar to Tania's in that he has a good sense of haumarutanga in his kāinga and with key whānau members. Although he is a passionate young man who has been able to engage with his interests and accomplish a lot already, like Tania he is lacking strong and consistent ārahitanga in relation to his next steps. The uncertainty of his future has impacted on Oliver's hauora too, causing anxiety around how he will be able to achieve his career goals.



Looking for a change: Tania's story

Mahi/Akoranga Case Illustration #1

Where did my transition journey begin?



Where am I now?



How did I get here?



What's next?

Where did my transition journey begin?

Tania had been living with non-kin foster parents in a small town for just under a year – the longest Oranga Tamariki care placement she had experienced. Tania is Māori and Pākehā but identifies more strongly with her Māori heritage. She had a strong bond with her foster parents, calling them 'mum' and 'dad' and felt like part of their family. Without her foster whānau, Tania felt that she would have missed out on a lot.

Tania wanted to remain living with her foster whānau once she turned 18 and had begun making plans.

Tania's mahi/akoranga goals at year 1 were to study Youth Work the following year through a national provider and she was hoping to get an internship in a local organisation as well. Her long-term dream was to use her future qualification to support and advocate for other tamariki and rangatahi in care.

Where am I now?

At the time of the year 3 interview, Tania was no longer engaged in her youth work internship and instead had a job in the food service industry.

Tania does not enjoy her food service job. She finds it stressful and has had run-ins with managers while advocating for herself and other staff. She wants to make a change but feels stuck

Although she is still living with her foster whānau and is comfortable there, Tania recognises a desire to move out and be independent. She had plans to go flatting with friends but decided against it as they like to party too much. Financially it also makes sense for her to stay where she is for the time being. A great positive of Tania's foster whānau are that they are also Māori. They are engaged with their hapū, iwi and marae and use te reo Māori regularly in the home. This has sustained and nurtured Tania's connection to te ao Māori and has encouraged her to explore her own whakapapa further.

Tania gave a Likert rating of 2 in the final interview, the same rating she gave the previous year.

"Yeah, we've a really cool bond and like they teach me so many things and support me quite a bit."

"I wouldn't have known and I probably wouldn't have gotten extra support, like my counselling, driving lessons, my licence and a whole bunch of stuff like necessities that I need in life."

"Yes, we have with my transition worker and we made like an agreement and everything that I have to pay rent, which is big kid stuff and fair enough and I'm welcome to live there whenever I want or however long."



"I'm thinking more like an apprenticeship in building or painting because I really love painting. I've done two trials and I've just really enjoyed it. But, yeah, no one wants to hire me for an apprenticeship because I don't have the qualifications... and I can't afford to go and study for them. And my car keeps breaking..."

"because like everything's falling apart."



Tania's story continued



How did I get here?



What's next?

How did I get here?

Tania explained that she had been unable to keep up with her studies and her internship had been ended by the provider agency.

Tania felt unsupported to navigate the challenges she was experiencing and unsure how to advocate for herself.

Tania had talked openly about her mental health struggles at years 1 and 2 and these were only exacerbated by her job and other hardships she had been experiencing when we spoke at the year 3 interview. Tania also talked about witnessing racism in her workplace, "Because I've heard a lot of racist stuff. Just being like, "Kia ora, what kai can I get you tonight?", stuff like that, and they're just like, you know, a racist."

She had been receiving counselling, however she had been busy and missed some appointments causing her counsellor to close her file which she was feeling upset about.

What's next?

Tania's main focus at the moment is to change to a job she enjoys and that is less stressful.

She also feels that she still needs counselling, "I really need counselling but, you know, it's just too much admin to find a new counsellor and my case file got closed. I can't really afford counselling anyway." So she has decided not to re-engage.

"Well, because of COVID, you know, my internship -- but also like it was too much for me because I was struggling a lot with my mental health..."

"they were always like, 'Oh, yeah, we'll support you and help you' but they didn't really..." "I struggle a lot with reading and writing and I didn't know how to advocate for that because I didn't want to get the piss taken out of me."

"I don't really talk to anyone anymore. My counsellor closed my file, even though I've been asking her for a counselling session for a little bit and she just randomly decided to message me, 'Hey, we haven't had a session since August. I think it's time to close your file.' I'm like, 'Okay. I really need counselling but okay.'"



"No, I think I'm just going to leave it, like not getting counselling and mother nature. I'll just go camping once my car's fixed and then figure it out from there."



Seeking Guidance: Oliver's Story

Mahi/Akoranga - Case Illustration #2

Where did my transition journey begin?



Where am I now?



How did I get here?



What's next?

Where did my transition journey begin?

Oliver is a Māori male who was 17 at the first interview. He was at boarding school while under care and protection and staying with his Nan and sister when not attending school. Oliver talked of suffering childhood trauma and being thankful that he was in care and protection with his Nan. He is a confident, driven, and hardworking young man who has clear goals around creating and performing music – Oliver had a settled home life with his Nan and although he had to move schools due to issues with bullying, he was thriving at his new school.

Oliver has a strong connection to his whānau through his Nan and sister, he also speaks of various aunties who pop in from time to time and offer support. He has not connected with his Māori heritage and is unsure of his whakapapa.

At the time of the first interview Oliver spoke of having had a lot of social workers, However, he was not sure if he had a transition worker or what a transition worker was. He did not have a clear plan once out of Oranga Tamariki care.

Where am I now?

At year 3, Oliver was still living with his Nan and enjoyed the security and stable nature of his home life.

He has continued to work on his passion for performing and is in the final year of a diploma course in music. Oliver is also performing gigs and emceeing events which allows him to earn money while studying. He is proud of his accomplishments to date but is concerned about his next steps and lack of direction. The one area of uncertainty is around his future.

Oliver continues to be in close contact with his sisters and they support him. His relationship with his wider whānau isn't as strong and he has still not connected with his mother's side of the whānau.

Regarding contact from Oranga Tamariki, Oliver has not had much interaction at all.

"My plan is to do music...that was to go work, get my money and get the equipment."

"I've had heaps, they're always changing. I remember having a social worker for like about ten minutes and then he'll leave or she'll leave."



"Home will always be home to me. No, nothing has changed. Everything's still the same. I mean, it's all lovely and that."

"This is my final year of diploma as well, and this is the great part, but the worst part is the next year plan, the vision".

"Yeah, like a pathway...I think that's only because right now I'm pretty anxious for what next year brings to us."

"Yeah, so I get along with all of them with ease. Like, they check up on me every day."

"You know what, I haven't heard from them in -- I haven't heard of them since last year. I haven't heard one word from them. But no, they still give me, like, \$100 a fortnight. That's about it."



Oliver's Story

continued



How did I get here?



What's next?

How did I get here?

Oliver's journey thus far has been assisted by a stable and secure living environment, with his Nan being a constant support, and by his connections with his sisters and wider whānau members.

His transition out of Oranga Tamariki care has been quite seamless. Although Oliver struggled with consistency with social workers, he did have a period of stability during year 2 with a social worker who he really connected with. Unfortunately, this connection only lasted a few months and then Oliver's transition worker changed again.

Music has been a constant in the 3 years of contact with Oliver and he has been in multiple bands throughout this time. He has done very well to complete his diploma and has a sense of confidence around his abilities.

What's next?

Oliver is unsure of what is next and is seeking guidance on options for his future. He is aware that music is not a traditional career option and is anxious about what path to take upon completion of his diploma.

He would like to continue to live with his Nan. Although he is aware that her health is deteriorating and he may need to move at some point, he is not focused on that at this time.

While Oliver has struggled with consistency of service from Oranga Tamariki in his transition, he is very thankful of their role in placing him into a safe and secure living arrangement as a child.

"But it was really hard because there were so many different people coming in saying, 'Yeah, I'll be your worker for today.' I had a worker for one day and she was gone.... But, no, this transition (worker) has been good. He's helped me out. He even comes through the studio and stuff, has a jam."

"Oh, yeah. Yeah, I'm on my way to finishing it with ease."



"You know, because I just -- all I know is that there's a place to go back to once everything is over and that's what I love about home."

"I really appreciate, I'm so grateful for everything that they (Oranga Tamariki) did for me when I was younger, man. Because I wouldn't be here today without them and I feel like, you know, I'm one of those stories that OT has. Like, I'm one of those stories. Like, through the media with them always getting negative comments and always getting put on blast that someone done this and done this and it's always on the controversial side. But I believe personally that I've -- that I was -- that I'm a story to tell from that -- from that environment that -- it's a good place."

Hauora | Health and wellbeing

Looking after my mental health – Bella’s story

Bella’s journey shows how hauora and mental wellbeing is a significant element of a young person’s life. Her story demonstrates that hauora has a far-reaching and often bi-directional influence on other areas like securing a safe and stable kāinga and being able to participate in mahi/akoranga and hapori. Although there have been many difficulties for Bella as she has navigated the transitional space towards independence, along with a lack of ārahitanga, her strong sense of mana ake in the form of self-awareness and self-determination comes through as a protective factor that has supported her to keep persevering towards her goals.

Resolving Trauma – Kaleb’s story

Kaleb’s experience also highlights the importance of hauora and mental wellbeing for rangatahi who are transitioning towards independence. He too has a strong sense of mana ake, and this has enabled him to be very aware of the negative impacts of trauma on his life and to be motivated to take steps towards healing. Unlike Bella, Kaleb had the right ārahitanga behind him while he explored his options and was able to put in boundaries that distanced him from connections that he felt weren’t good for him while choosing to strengthen positive relationships. Although many things were in his favour, it still wasn’t easy to get the right support in a way that was timely and affordable.



Looking after my mental health: Bella's story

Hauora Case Illustration #1

Where did my transition journey begin?



Where am I now?



How did I get here?



What's next?

Where did my transition journey begin?

Bella is Māori and European and was 17 years old when we met in the first interview. She had a very unsettling period in her college years, moving a lot between different family members, foster families and secondary schools in a number of towns. She left school early when her last living situation broke down and moved to the city to start a training course.

She had plans to finish her training course and get a job, but her main focus was to work on herself and get some help with her mental health issues. Bella said she felt like a "bit of a lost soul" trying to figure out what she wanted to do, but her past traumas were holding her back.

Although the situation wasn't the best, she was enjoying a bit of independence and felt that her confidence had grown a lot, "just meeting new people and just having the same interests as them as well." However, she admitted it had been a bit of a rocky start. She had trouble with her rent when changing from Oranga Tamariki payments to WINZ and Studylink. "There were a lot of things that were supposed to happen that were said but never done. So that was why I was so behind in my rent." She struggled to get hold of her social worker and had been told that she would be getting a transition worker who could help her, but this had not happened.

Where am I now?

Bella feels she is in a safe place now, living in a new flat and feels much more stable.

"I think when you haven't lived in a safe home ever, a lot of people really have an unstable lifestyle. But learning to stabilise that and learning to put your foot down and break that cycle, because it is a cycle for people like me that come from houses that aren't safe, we tend to create unstable lifestyles for ourselves getting older. And I think doing that is a really bad cycle and I want to break it, so I am breaking it, but it's just continuing to stay stable and have a place for yourself to go to when you need it – like my house."

Bella likes her job and sees it as really important for her wellbeing. "It keeps me busy, it keeps me on my toes. It has a routine for me. I'm getting paid, I'm getting money... it forces me to budget...and also, I'm really really really close with all my girls at work."

In the third interview Bella spoke about how her anxiety had gotten "progressively worse," and it was sometimes difficult for her to even go to the supermarket. "I think for me it's just like my mental health is probably my biggest barrier. Yes, I'm getting help but I am relapsing again now... but, yeah, I think just learning to cope with that and create coping mechanisms has helped heaps."

"There were a lot of things that were supposed to happen that were said but never done. So that was why I was so behind in my rent."

Bella had been feeling like a "bit of a lost soul" when we first met but more recently had been enjoying "meeting new people (with) the same interests."



"I think when you haven't lived in a safe home ever, a lot of people really have an unstable lifestyle. But learning to stabilise that and learning to put your foot down and break that cycle, because it is a cycle for people like me that come from houses that aren't safe, we tend to create unstable lifestyles for ourselves getting older. And I think doing that is a really bad cycle and I want to break it, so I am breaking it, but it's just continuing to stay stable and have a place for yourself to go to when you need it – like my house."

"It (my job) keeps me busy, it keeps me on my toes. It has a routine for me. I'm getting paid, I'm getting money... it forces me to budget... and also, I'm really really really close with all my girls at work."

"I think for me it's just like my mental health is probably my biggest barrier. Yes, I'm getting help but I am relapsing again now... but, yeah, I think just learning to cope with that and create coping mechanisms has helped heaps."



Bella's story continued



How did I get here?



What's next?

How did I get here?

Bella tried several flatting situations with friends, which had fallen through, and ended up couch surfing. She was courageous to look for a flat with people she didn't know and ended up finding a place through a posting on Facebook – "It took a lot for me to do it because I'm not one to move in with anyone I don't know."

Over all three interviews, Bella had consistently talked about her fluctuating mental health. At one point she felt she was coping well, "I think I've just grown in character and more on how to deal with it." She had started to see a therapist which was accessed through her transition worker, although initially declined by ACC.

Bella gave a Likert scale rating of '3 – Yes I think so' in the year 3 interview, a slight change to year 2 where she chose 'I don't know,' although her explanation both times was similar, expressing that it was "up and down" and changed a lot depending on the day which made it hard to quantify back in year 2.

Bella feels that her own determination and independence has gotten her to where she is now, especially with being very proactive and articulate about her mental health issues. She spoke about using alcohol to give her confidence, and eventually asked her doctor for a referral to mental health services. "So, I went to the doctor, and I was just like, 'Hey, I think this is what's going on. I need a referral and this needs to happen as soon as possible.' And so, the doctor – luckily, she was a nice doctor, and she did actually listen to me. She sent me through to the team over in – I can't remember the name, it is a mental health service."

What's next?

What Bella would like to tell other young people leaving Oranga Tamariki care:

"I think it depends on the situation. Like if you were in my situation where you don't have family and you don't have much outside support, create that family and create that support and really really keep those good people and good friends around for a while. Because it is going to be really hard, especially if you are living independently."

Her message to Oranga Tamariki and transition and other support services is:

"Don't let it happen again. Your social workers are overworked. They have too much of a caseload. There's too much. You, as the organisers, as the providers and the people that are supposed to be helping these kids, you're not doing enough."

"There's more that could have been done for myself and probably thousands of other kids that also landed in the same situation as me. We should not be left to take care of ourselves at the end of the day. Like there are so many years and years of stuff that could have been prevented for myself, that didn't need to happen... so I'm just, if anything, angry and I just think this could have ended differently."

"It took a lot for me to do it because I'm not one to move in with anyone I don't know."

"I think I've just grown in character and more on how to deal with it."

So, I went to the doctor, and I was just like, 'Hey, I think this is what's going on. I need a referral and this needs to happen as soon as possible.' And so, the doctor – luckily, she was a nice doctor, and she did actually listen to me. She sent me through to the team over in – I can't remember the name, it is a mental health service."



Bella would tell young people like her "If you were in my situation where you don't have family and you don't have much outside support, create that family and create that support and really really keep those good people and good friends around for a while. Because it is going to be really hard, especially if you are living independently."

Bella says support services "are overworked, they have too much of a case load. There's too much. You, as the organisers, as the providers and the people that are supposed to be helping these kids, you're not doing enough."

"There's more that could have been done for myself and probably thousands of other kids that also landed in the same situation as me. We should not be left to take care of ourselves at the end of the day. Like there are so many years and years of stuff that could have been prevented for myself, that didn't need to happen... so I'm just, if anything, angry and I just think this could have ended differently."



Resolving trauma: Kaleb's story

Hauora Case Illustration #2

Where did my transition journey begin?



Where am I now?



How did I get here?



What's next?

Where did my transition journey begin?

Kaleb was living in an Oranga Tamariki family home for the past four years when we spoke at the year 1 interview. He got on really well with the caregivers there and explained that although he was in a (non-related) family caregiving home, they had "taken him in" and had become his family. It was clear from our first interview that Kaleb had a deep mistrust of Oranga Tamariki, and that his experiences in care had negatively impacted his hauora and mental health.

Kaleb has had a good relationship with his transition worker over this time, who was based at a local youth centre. Kaleb enjoyed spending time there and they had been helping him study for his learner's driving licence.

He has been studying a pre-trade mechanical course at the local Polytechnic and was excited to be completing it in the next four weeks. He wasn't too sure if he would go straight into work the following year or complete more study.

Although he described himself as shy and a "lone wolf," Kaleb enjoyed engaging in a special hobby, however it was quite expensive, and he had been struggling to convince Oranga Tamariki to provide some funding toward it.

Where am I now?

Kaleb is living in a house with his family – his previous caregivers from the Oranga Tamariki family home, their son and his partner. This is an ideal situation for Kaleb and he describes it as, "Really nice. It's like actually having a family... yeah, a family unit. Everyone's together."

Kaleb works at a general fabrication company. He enjoys his employment there but would prefer a welding job. Overall, he likes the work and gets on well with his co-workers. "I found out one of my co-workers does [my hobby]. And so, I've gotten back into it and I'm really loving it now."

Although he still hasn't sat his learner licence, he isn't too worried about it because he gets around easily on his electric skateboard.

Kaleb had given a Likert scale rating of 2 at the year 2 interview, signalling that things were not going ok overall. He attributed this to, "Mostly trauma and dealing with that stuff...because the stuff that I'm trying to deal with, it's their fault [Oranga Tamariki] and it was their problem they should've fixed."

He rated his current situation as a 4 on the Likert scale, stating that things were "going great at the moment." When asked why he replied, "because OT is out of my life... Oranga Tamariki is not a part of my life anymore."



"Yeah, I do not trust CYFS one bit because at one point, around two years they kept me in the dark when I've kept telling my social worker, 'Tell me what's going on' and they didn't. Because I was meant to be in the family home for around two weeks. How long has it been? Yeah, three or four years...And that was before the new caregivers came... and when the new caregivers came, I was depressed before that, I was really depressed because they kept me in the dark and I didn't know what was happening and I didn't know what was like going on and I didn't know what my plan was."



"Really nice. It's like actually having a family... yeah, a family unit. Everyone's together."

"I found out one of my co-workers does [my hobby]. And so, I've gotten back into it and I'm really loving it now."

"Mostly trauma and dealing with that stuff...because the stuff that I'm trying to deal with, it's their fault [Oranga Tamariki] and it was their problem they should've fixed."

"Kaleb reported that things were 'going great at the moment because OT is out of my life... Oranga Tamariki is not a part of my life anymore."



Kaleb's story continued



How did I
get here?



What's next?

How did I get here?

At our year 2 interview, many things had changed for Kaleb. He had decided to stop contact with his biological family, due to an incident, and spoke about how this had been a positive choice for him. He had fully transitioned into being part of his caregiver family, and was flatting with his brother in a property owned by his parents and was happy there.

Kaleb was no longer in contact with his transition worker because he didn't see himself as the type of young person that could benefit from their support and had distanced himself from the youth centre too – "they just deal with certain kids, and I don't really fit in that category."

He was working in the fabrication industry, although he wasn't too keen on the type of work he was doing. Eventually, he got in touch with TradeAssist who set up an interview for his current job the next day.

Accessing counselling to deal with the trauma of his past was something that helped Kaleb greatly, however, it was not an easy process. He booked an appointment in year 2 but would have to wait three months to attend it. It was also expensive, with Kaleb explaining in year 3 that it had cost him approximately \$150 per session, which he paid for himself. For him though, it was worth it – "I did go to that (counselling) and it helped a lot. I went like maybe five times but that's really all I needed...I recommend almost everybody to go there. Obviously, not many people want to, but it is definitely worth it...Especially if you've been in obviously Oranga Tamariki or in a similar situation."

What's next?

Kaleb's main goals for the future are to find a welding job, and to eventually sit his learner licence.

Kaleb would tell other young people: "I'd say be as stubborn as possible....I've gotten through my life because mostly I've been stubborn".

"they just deal with certain kids, and I don't really fit in that category."

"I did go to that (counselling) and it helped a lot. I went like maybe five times but that's really all I needed...I recommend almost everybody to go there. Obviously, not many people want to, but it is definitely worth it...Especially if you've been in obviously Oranga Tamariki or in a similar situation."



"I've gotten through my life because mostly I've been stubborn and because...I've always known what I've wanted and a lot of people have tried to change my mind...When Oranga Tamariki or CYFS back then told me how to do certain stuff and I just said, 'No' because it wasn't in my best interest."

"Yeah, and there's been a lot of -- there's been a lot of scenarios when I could have very easily given in or have given up, but I didn't because of my stubbornness."

Ngā Hononga | Connected relationships

Life behind bars – Sam’s story

Sam’s story makes it clear that ngā hononga are extremely important for young people and that their absence can make difficult life situations feel much worse. Within his story we see that the systems he encountered during his transition – youth justice and care and protection – were extremely detrimental to his sense of connection and belonging and caused him much distress. Within these systems, Sam was prevented from engaging with and maintaining his positive relationships – at times not being able to connect with anyone at all – and in their absence, he had to make other, possibly less positive, connections instead.





Life behind bars: Sam's story

Hononga Case Illustration

Where did my transition journey begin?



Where am I now?



How did I get here?



What's next?

Where did my transition journey begin?

When Sam was first interviewed at 17, he had been in a youth justice facility for six months. Before then, he had lived with his Mum and some younger siblings; they are a tight family. Sam's always been pretty keen on club sport. Before YJ he had some good friends in his neighbourhood and in his club. At the time of the first interview, he had a social worker and a transition worker, but Sam didn't rate either of them because they hadn't followed through on things they said they would do, and they hadn't been in contact with him as much as he wanted. Sam was looking forward to being released and going back to live with his Mum. He was also keen to re-join his old sports club when the new season started.



Sam was looking forward to being released and going back to live with his Mum



Covid restrictions meant he could not have any visitors, and he was on lock-up (alone in his cell) for 22 hours each day. He used his time in the yard to keep fit.



He reoffended around a month after his release, and was sent back to prison. At first, his Mum couldn't visit because she was on home detention, but she talked to him daily by phone, and he often talked to his siblings.

Where am I now?

Sam's been in prison for quite a while now. 2021-2022 were tough times to be a prisoner, with staff shortages, Covid restrictions and court delays impacting on remand times and on access to programmes within prison. Sam spent many months on remand, and his sentencing was not scheduled for more than a year after his latest offending. Remand meant no access to work, rehabilitation or education programmes, and Covid restrictions meant he could not have any visitors, and he was on lock-up (alone in his cell) for 22 hours each day. He used his time in the yard to keep fit. His \$5 weekly phone card from Corrections gives him about 12 minutes of talk time each week with his Mum.

How did I get here?

When Sam was first released, he did go back and live with Mum, and was supported into a fulltime job by a new transition worker, which he enjoyed. He really liked the transition worker who has consistently supported him since. However, the job was short-lived: he reoffended around a month after his release, and was sent back to prison. At first, his Mum couldn't visit because she was on home detention, but she talked to him daily by phone, and he often talked to his siblings. He really valued this contact during his time inside, but his only visits were from professionals. After a few months in prison, Sam's Mum also went into prison custody, which meant they could only communicate via letters. Sam's siblings went into care and were separated. Sam wasn't allowed to phone his siblings and was told by the prison social worker that while he could write to them, they were not allowed to write back to him.



Sam's story continued



How did I
get here?



What's next?

Sam was released from prison in late 2021, and with Mum also out by then, he moved back to live with her. His siblings remained in care. Whereas last time his transition worker had sorted employment for him, this was not the case this time around, but he did help arrange a benefit. As before, Sam only lasted a few weeks in the community before he reoffended and returned to prison. While he was in the community, Sam got to see some of his siblings – his first face-to-face contact with them for over a year. Once back inside, he had phone contact with his Mum but this was his only source of hononga apart from with his transition worker and fellow prisoners. Custody of both Sam and his Mum has significantly impacted connections within their family unit.

When Sam first went into Youth Justice care, he had a mix of friends – some who got into trouble like Sam, and others who were quite focused on their sport, education or work. Sam didn't want his mates visiting him, but he got to see some as they came in and out of YJ and later prison custody. He's made other mates in prison, but he's lost contact with all his old friends who haven't been in trouble. For him, positive connections are limited to his Mum and his transition worker, and the times in his journey where it has been hard to maintain connections to his Mum and siblings have been the biggest challenges for him.

What's next?

At the start Sam wanted a job that made him lots of money. In the short time he was out and working, he enjoyed being employed. Two years on, work is no longer part of his goals in life, and Sam seems quite settled in prison. While he says he wants to stay out of trouble, he doesn't see this as likely. Uncertainties around the timing of his release have made it impossible to plan for the future, and it seems that the transition worker's main influence is on helping him keep out of trouble while inside. Sam likes him because he understands what Sam has been through, and he focuses his energies on doing things that actually help – he follows through on promises.

Sam didn't think he could give the best advice to his younger self or to other young people going into Oranga Tamariki care, but he did say to "just be good. Check you're behaving politely, nicely."

Sam only lasted a few weeks in the community before he reoffended and returned to prison. While he was in the community, Sam got to see some of his siblings

"I get locked up and they just forget about me. I get out, I've forgotten about them."



"I want to try stay out, eh, but reality, probably no. I'll end up coming back. ... Institutionalised. It's just all we know now. Life behind bars."

"just be good. Check you're behaving politely, nicely."

Hapori | Community participation

Outstanding success for a rangatahi with different abilities - Lee's Story

Lee's story could have had a very different outcome if not for the concentrated efforts of a key organisation and their kaimahi who created tailored, wraparound supports that were the right fit for his needs and the needs of his whānau. For a short time before these supports were in place, the negative impacts on Lee's wellbeing were evident. Although Lee has found a safe and secure kāinga in his supported living situation, more importantly he has become part of a community. Being with people who really care about Lee and have the understanding and resources to meet his needs has provided a huge sense of haumarutanga to both Lee and his whānau. His sense of mana ake and self-determination is being nurtured, he has strong connections to others within his community, his potential is being explored by having the right ārahitanga in place and as a result, he has made great progress towards his goals.



Outstanding success for a rangatahi with different abilities: Lee's story

Supported Living Case Illustration

Where did my transition journey begin?



Where am I now?



How did I get here?



What's next?

Where did my transition journey begin?

When I first met Lee, he was 17 years old and had been living with a very supportive caregiver for about five years in a family home where he was treated like whānau. He attended a special education class at high school. Lee is largely non-verbal, only speaking a few words now and then. He seemed really settled, but there were some behaviours of concern that were coming to light. His foster mother shared that her goal for Lee was for him to continue at school for another year, and then move to a supported living arrangement.

"He'll take everything he's learnt from here, go home and do it again. Really loves to make things we've built.... The planter boxes. He's helped build all of those. He's planted. He's dug up the ground for all the kai, all the vegetables. So he's been a huge part of that progress out there for all the kai in the yard, all the vegetables."
(Supported Living kaimahi)



Where am I now?

Lee was a changed person when I saw him again in year 3, from where he had been in year 2, having moved out of his foster care and into unstable and unfamiliar living environments for a few months. There was a lot of concern for his wellbeing back then. Lee has moved to a supported living situation, managed by a Social Support Service organisation. He smiles and feels positive about where he lives and gets on well with the kaimahi (support workers). He has a good friend who also lives in the whare. He has become more verbal and communicative. Lee is able to have more independence by living there now.

The kaimahi agree Lee is comfortable where he is now living and is starting to come out of his shell. He shows dedication to all the activities and likes making garden boxes and planting gardens. He especially enjoys food, he looks healthy and well and has a great new hairstyle. Lee spends a lot of time in his own arts and crafts room and loves riding bicycles. He now wants to learn to ride a motorcycle.

"When I arrived (at the organisation) I couldn't get two words out of Lee. So now you can have a full conversation with him. He's able to articulate how he's feeling, what he wants and what he needs...whereas he wasn't able to do that when I first started working with him. So, he's really found his voice... it's amazing to watch him."
(Supported Living kaimahi)



Lee's story continued



How did I
get here?



What's next?

How did I get here?

Lee's behaviours had become increasingly concerning prior to, and early on in, his new living situation - particularly around risky behaviours. The perseverance and commitment of the organisation's management, and the team of kaimahi ensure Lee feels comfortable in his living situation and is active during the day. Through careful implementation of specific strategies, alongside 24-hour supervision and good connections made with kaimahi, he is enabled to pursue his interests and live well. He has been provided with an environment that works for him, like creating things in his own arts and crafts room, daily activities he is interested in, and persevering with communication skills. Guidance has been provided by kaimahi and a mentor who sees Lee fortnightly. This has resulted in very few risky behaviours as had been the case a year ago. He appears to be well psychologically, mentally and physically.

"We found that with support around all of those things he can be trusted to do these things and do them -- even independently." (Kaimahi)

Although the organisation was unable to acquire funding for 1-1 support, they have continued to provide specialised care to Lee, *"No specialist support at all. It's all been in-house by kaiāwhina support really to tell what can we do to help him and support him and those things."*

What's next?

The support of the organisation has ensured that Lee's overall wellbeing has substantially improved, his āhua (appearance) is more open and positive and he looks healthy and well. But one thing missing is re-connecting him with a whānau member he wants to see. The Trust has not been able to make that contact yet.

"So that's a big connection... that we're missing for him, is a whānau connection... we're huge on whānau being involved with them and their pathway through life. But for him there hasn't been one since he's been with the Trust." (Kaimahi)

Thinking about mahi in the future, the kaimahi noted he likes woodwork and this might be an area he could pursue workwise but he would need a specialised type of training course if he were to pursue a career or trade.

Kaimahi also identified that they would like to see Lee develop a little more independence and have some unsupervised time. They have started testing this out and it is going well. They would love to see whether Lee can live semi-independently which shows how far he has come.

"That's it. I mean I'm really happy with his progress. I would love to see what the future has in store for him and if he does, you know, is there a possibility of him being independent and going and living semi-independent where he doesn't have -- because at the moment he has 24-hour support. He's always with one of us, we're always supporting him to do things. I'd love to see what he could do on his own, given the chance." (Kaimahi)

The outstanding support of the organisation and the care and support of kaimahi shows that much can be done for and with rangatahi with different abilities to help them achieve wellbeing and open the doors to reaching their full potential.



"We found that with support around all of those things he can be trusted to do these things and do them -- even independently." (Supported Living kaimahi)

"No specialist support at all. It's all been in-house by kaiāwhina support really to tell what can we do to help him and support him and those things." (Supported Living kaimahi)



"So that's a big connection... that we're missing for him, is a whānau connection... we're huge on whānau being involved with them and their pathway through life. But for him there hasn't been one since he's been with the Trust." (Supported Living kaimahi)

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Staying crime free

Leaving youth justice – Brian and Troy’s stories

Troy and Brian’s stories provide two contrasting experiences of the youth justice system.

Both young men had great potential and many innate strengths that were easily identified by others while in the youth justice facility. They both wanted to stay crime free once they left the youth justice unit, and when prompted were able to think ahead about what they might find difficult and what could help them along the way.

Brian was able to engage with the right ārahitanga/guidance once he got out and leveraged positive relationships to help him achieve his goal to stay crime free.

Troy’s path wasn’t as straightforward once he left the unit. Some of the connections he continued with once out of YJ took him further away from his goal while the ārahitanga/guidance he then received was seen as unhelpful. He unfortunately ended up returning to the justice system.



Leaving Youth Justice: Brian and Troy's stories

Staying Crime Free Case Illustrations

Where did our transition journey begin?



Where are we now?



How did we get here?



What's next?

Where did our transition journey begin?

Brian and Troy were both 17 year old tāne staying in a Youth Justice unit when we talked to them separately in year 1.

Brian was showing his hardworking abilities on the farm and just wanted to get out of there as soon as possible. He was keen on getting a job and moving back somewhere close to his whānau and hoped to get back into sport too. He hadn't thought too much about what might stop him getting back into crime, only that "staying active and getting a job" would help, especially since he perceived being physical and active as one of his strengths.

His kaimahi (YJ worker) saw Brian as a humble person, hard working and quick to learn.

Troy was showing great leadership skills when he was in the Youth Justice unit. Thinking about when he got out, he wanted to continue to work out and stay fit and healthy. Although he was keen on getting a job for the money, he said he wanted to get on a course first. He'd had jobs before and they hadn't gone very well, so he was a bit worried about getting a job straight away.

Troy had also been on training courses but hadn't been motivated to go to them even when he was offered transport - "Just no motivation, just didn't want to do anything." He was, however, starting to see its importance in his life.

He'd also been struggling to get some of the practice tests right for his driver's licence, but he wanted to change it. "When I get out, I want to just do the -- I'll just do the test."

Similar to other rangatahi his age, Troy wanted basic things, like to "move out of there (his whānau home), get a car, get my licence, and have an income, money."

He wanted to stay out of trouble and he felt he would be able to make his own decisions about that.

We talked about what would help him when he got out and he felt it would come from his own determination, to "just push yourself" and "have a friend there to push you as well." When talking about what he would do if he got together with the wrong people that would get him back into trouble he felt that he would be strong enough to make his own decision. When asked how he would respond to peer pressure he said, "if there's something I don't want to do I won't do it." But he was also realistic that having money was important "just to get by" and that he would need an income. He saw having money as being linked to your wairua (spirit) "because you feel good." At this point in time, it was not about serving an addiction but about feeling independent and feeling good about that.

Troy had talked to case workers and a transition worker in the town he would move back to and was hoping that they would support him to get into a course and get his licence. Although he had to think about it, Troy saw his strengths as being "good at motivating myself to do things, even if I'm not good at it, just do it." And the kaimahi saw his leadership also - "I think you're a really good leader in the unit... you're very outspoken, if you want to say something you will say it...Yeah, really good discipline, I feel you have, yeah, and you're really good at encouraging yourself and others."

"Brian is a humble man. He's very quiet spoken, so he just gets on with things and excels in everything that he does." As another kaimahi explained, "(He's) got a mean work ethic. Not just physically... he'll get his head down and then he'll do stuff and then he'll excel at it. He also picks up and learns very quickly. Quick to actually put that hard work down like the mental strategies and that." (Brian's YJ kaimahi)

"Before I came in, I was mental up on that course, but they were coming around picking up and I was like, "No, I don't want to go" but now that I'm in here I want to get out and do something legit and that's like a start. So, I can start there." (Troy)



*"I've done jobs a few times and when I was doing it, I just get so frustrated because I don't know what to do and like people are like, "Bro --" the other workers that know what to do give you shit because you don't know how to do anything. You're like, "F****", you know, you just -- I can't manage doing a job that I don't know how to do, so I was telling them that I will be keen to jump on a course and learn about a job before jumping straight into it." (Troy)*

"Just doing my time. Get out and stay out. Don't come back and stay out of trouble when I get out. Avoid trouble." (Troy)



Brian and Troy's stories

Continued

Where are we now?



How did we get here?



What's next?

Where are we now?

Brian is now a dad. He was living with his new partner, their baby and a whānau member at the time of the Year 3 interview. After leaving the Youth Justice unit, he connected with a transition worker and did a job-seeking course. He ended up getting a job through his father and works fulltime doing very long hours – six days a week. He had tried to get back into sport but was too tired after work so he gave that up. In fact, he was often too tired to do anything else on his day off but sleep. Brian has stayed out of crime. Brian wasn't interviewed in year 2 of the study but gave a Likert scale rating of 3 in the current interview – 'Yes I think so' when asked if things are going ok. He wasn't quite sure why but mentioned that, "This job might take me somewhere in life, something else better where I want to be."

Troy got into trouble with the law within a year of leaving the Youth Justice unit. When I talked to his whānau last, he had been sentenced and was in an adult prison. His whānau felt that his sentence was particularly lengthy for the situation and stated that the lawyer didn't speak up enough. A whānau member said that "a social worker that spoke at the court hearing said to us that if she'd seen the paperwork, he shouldn't have got that sentence." She was able to request a cultural report which helped reduce it. One whānau member who attended a parole meeting reported that they said he could possibly get out earlier, but he needed to do courses, however no courses had been offered to him. She thought maybe they were short staffed or there were none available. She thinks the "system sucks."

Troy is a dad also. He still connects with his partner and less so with his whānau, although when he calls, he says he is "clocking in to let you know I'm alright." He has been mixing with a gang now, but he doesn't want them around his kids. His brother said he was sounding mature by saying that. A whānau member says his situation in prison hasn't been good, he has been in a few fights and has been in the isolated secure unit. "He won't talk about it to us. He says you got to be in there to know what it's like." Another whānau member had said "It's hard not to fight if people come at you – fights come to you."

When I spoke to a whānau member, Troy had just come out of being in the secure unit for two weeks. "One time he was there for a whole month. You can hear the difference in his voice afterwards" she said and was very worried about it. "Prison is hard when you're with people with hardened criminals. Troy is not getting any better – he's a people person. Finds it hard not to be with family." Troy was not able to give a Likert Scale rating at either the year 2 or 3 interviews.

*"This job might take me somewhere in life, something else better where I want to be."
(Brian)*

*"A social worker that spoke at the court hearing said to us that if she'd seen the paperwork, he shouldn't have got that sentence."
(Troy's whanau member)*



*"He won't talk about it to us. He says you got to be in there to know what it's like." Another whānau member had said "It's hard not to fight if people come at you – fights come to you."
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(Troy's whanau member)*



Brian and Troy's stories

Continued



How did we get here?



What's next?

How did we get here?

Brian says what helped him the most to stay crime free has been having his job and his parents. His job "keeps me out of trouble," and his parents, "they help keep me on the right track."

Troy was unable to navigate life well after leaving the youth justice unit. He went down a path with friends that got him into trouble with the law again and this took him into the adult prison system. He already had links to gangs but had so far stayed away from them, however, now he is more involved. He became a dad, but now has a lengthy sentence. He has gone down a path he really didn't want to go down.

What's next?

Brian aspires to start training in another career and has been looking into it. He has dreams that he wants to fulfil. Brian is living well, with his new family and whānau support, and a job that keeps him busy.

Troy's whānau member believes in change, that people can change even after prison. "I'm a Christian. So, I have hope for him." She is hopeful he will get bailed to them when he gets out. She is aware that if he goes to another town he may get caught between gangs. One of the workers from the Youth Justice unit still follows up with him and says to the whānau "I will always be there for Troy."

Troy's story is particularly heart-breaking – people saw a lot of potential in Troy, he was noted as a leader, and was bright and charismatic. He alluded to some difficulties with learning things and these challenges may be symptoms of deeper issues. Unfortunately, Troy was unable to keep out of trouble and this has led to a difficult path for him and his whānau.

Brian says what helped him the most to stay crime free has been having his job and his parents. His job "keeps me out of trouble," and his parents, "they help keep me on the right track."



Brian aspires to start training in another career and has been looking into it. He has dreams that he wants to fulfil. Brian is living well, with his new family and whānau support, and a job that keeps him busy.

"I'm a Christian. So, I have hope for him."
(Troy's whānau member)

"I will always be there for Troy."
(Troy's YJ kaimahi)

Unfortunately, Troy was unable to keep out of trouble and this has led to a difficult path for him and his whānau.